Anansi, the crows, and the crocodiles



Writer: Ghanaian folktale

Illustration: Wiehan de Jager

English

Story Book

Anansi, the crows, and the crocodiles

Writer: Ghanaian folktale
Illustration: Wiehan de Jager

English

Anansi, the crows, and the crocodiles
Writer: Ghanaian folktale
Illustration: Wiehan de Jager



One day there was a great famine in the land. No one had anything to eat except the crows.
Each morning they flew a long distance to where there was a tree with ripe figs in the middle of a wide river. Then they flew back with the figs for themselves and their relatives.
The sight of so many figs made Anansi's mouth water. How could he get them for himself?



He thought of a plan. He carefully covered his bottom with sticky beeswax. Then he took a piece of clay pot and went to see the crows. “Please could you help me?” he asked. “I need a live coal to get my fire going again.”

As they were getting the coal from the fire, Anansi carefully sat firmly on one of the largest figs, so that it would stick to his bottom. He thanked the crows, and hurried home to enjoy the fig.



But one fig wasn’t enough for him. He went back a second time, and did the same. When he went back a third time, the crows began to get suspicious.
“Why do you keep coming back to us to get a coal?” they said. Anansi answered,
“Every time when I get home, the coal has burnt out.”
“You’re lying!” said the crows. “You just want our food!”
“That’s not true,” said Anansi.
And he started crying.



The crows felt sorry for him. The next morning at first light, each crow gave him a feather. He flew with them to the fig tree in the middle of the wide river. When he saw the luscious figs, Anansi wanted them all for himself.

Each time a crow tried to pick a fig, he shouted out, “That one is mine! I saw it first!” And then he took the fig and put it into his bag. Eventually he had all the figs and the crows had none.



He was left all alone as the darkness began to fall.
“If I don’t want to stay in this tree for the rest of my life,” he said to himself, “I’ll just have to jump into the air like the crows”.
So he took a deep breath, jumped, and...PLOP!
He fell into the river right among the crocodiles.



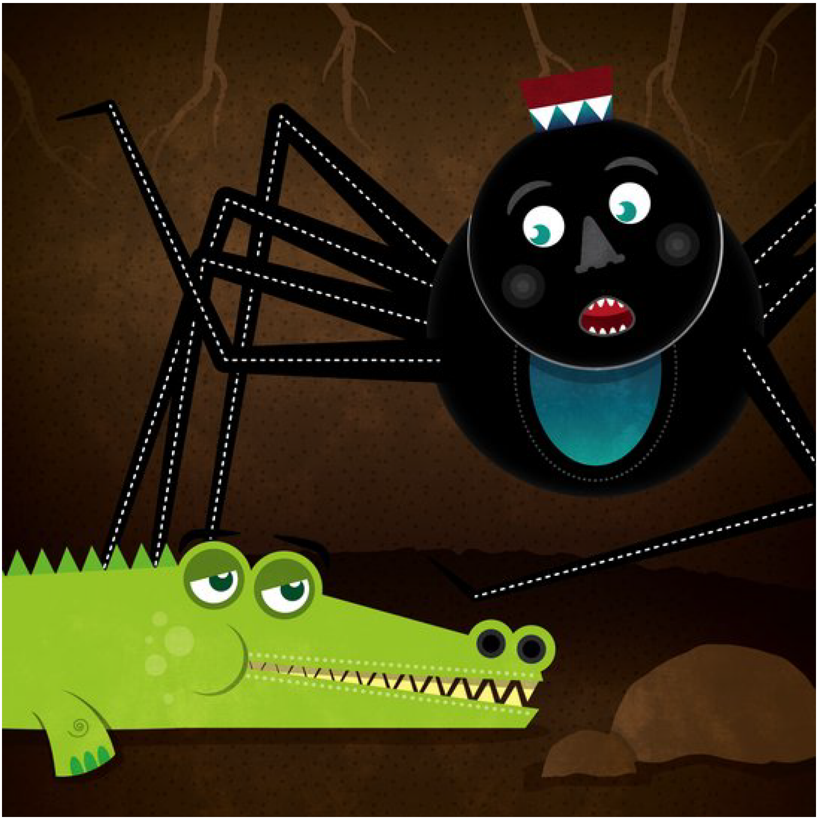
“What do we have here?” said a gruff crocodile voice.
“A tasty morsel to eat, nyum...”
“Oh please don’t,” said Anansi. And he began to cry.
“I’m one of you, don’t you know? I got lost in the days of your grandfathers and no one was able to find me. You’re the first of my relatives I’ve ever met!”
He cried so much that the crocodiles felt sorry for him.



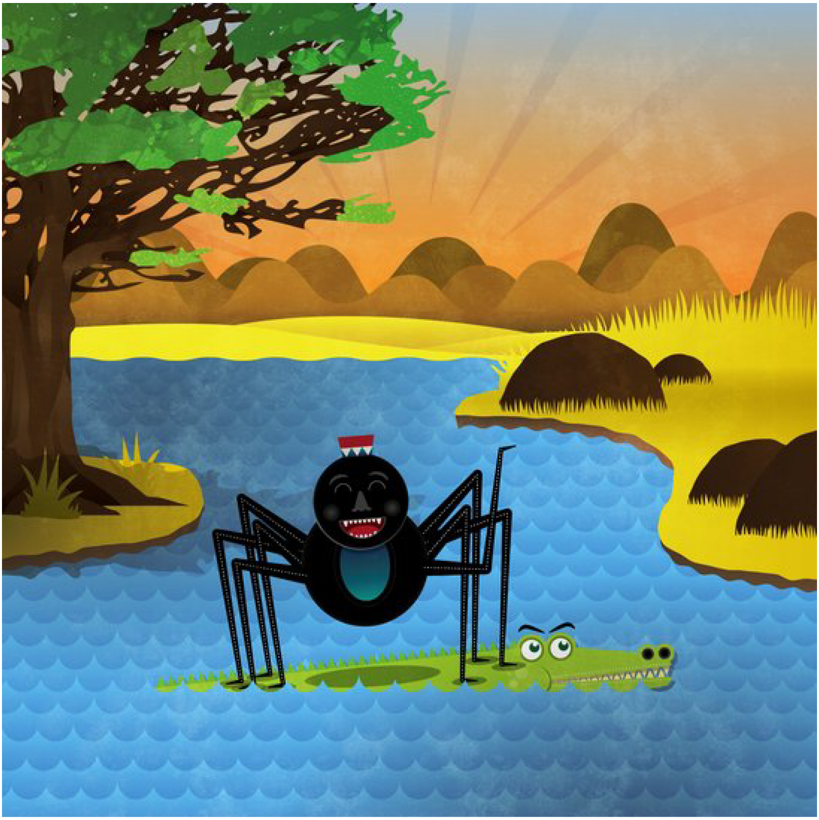
The oldest crocodile said, “We’ll know you’re one of us if you can eat and enjoy mud soup just like we do.”
They gave him a pot of dirty brown water.
“Just like my grandmother used to make it!” Anansi said.
But he made a hole in the ground with his back foot, and a hole in the pot with his front foot. As he pretended to drink the soup, it oozed down through the pot into the hole beneath his feet.



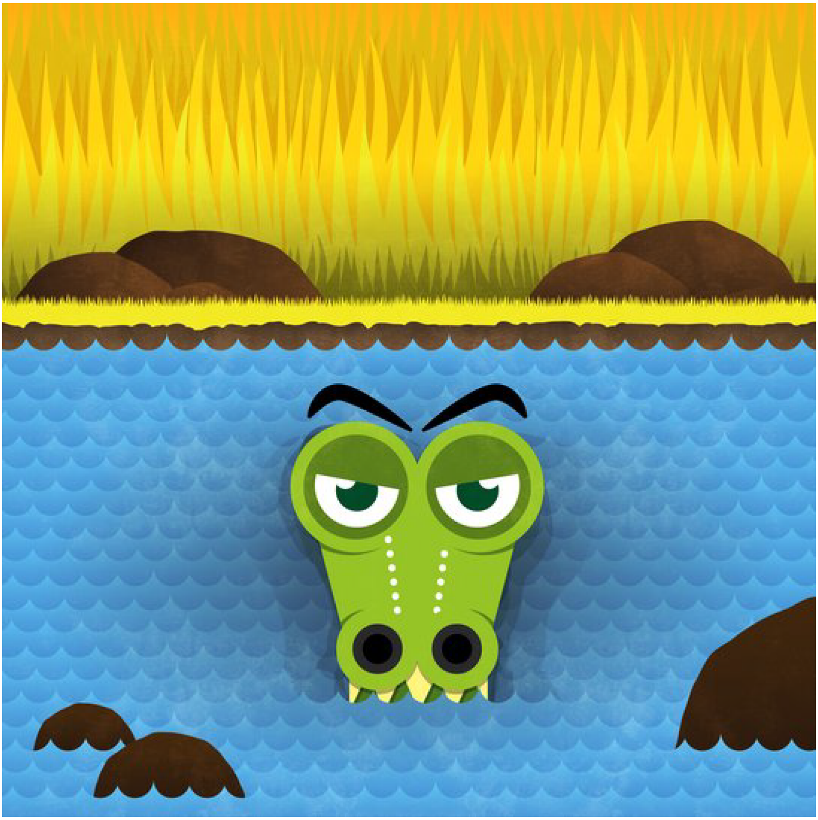
"Delicious!" he exclaimed, giving back the empty pot.
"Now we know you are definitely one of us," the crocodiles said.
So they allowed Anansi to sleep in their hole with them for the night.
"Tomorrow morning I'll tell you the story of my life," said Anansi as they fell asleep.



Early the next morning, before first light, Anansi woke up one of the crocodiles.
“I want to go and fetch my wife and children from across the river, so that they can help me tell my story. Will you help me before the others wake up?” he asked the crocodile.



The crocodile was grumpy at being woken up so early.
“Please help me! You swim much faster than I do,” Anansi said.
The crocodile agreed, and Anansi rode on his back to the bank of the river.
He climbed off quickly. “I’ll be back soon! Don’t go away!” Anansi said, as he disappeared through the grass.



As far as we know, the crocodile is waiting for him still, with just his long snout and his beady eyes above the surface of the river.